

George Washington

George Washington (February 22, 1732^[b] – December 14, 1799) was an American political leader, military general, statesman, and founding father who served as the first president of the United States from 1789 to 1797. Previously, he led Patriot forces to victory in the nation's War for Independence. He presided at the Constitutional Convention of 1787, which established the U.S. Constitution and a federal government. Washington has been called the "Father of His Country" for his manifold leadership in the formative days of the new nation.

Washington received his initial military training and command with the Virginia Regiment during the French and Indian War. He was later elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses and was named a delegate to the Continental Congress, where he was appointed Commanding General of the Continental Army. He commanded American forces, allied with France, in the defeat and surrender of the British during the Siege of Yorktown. He resigned his commission after the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

Washington played a key role in adopting and ratifying the Constitution and was then elected president (twice) by the Electoral College. He implemented a strong, well-financed national government while remaining impartial in a fierce rivalry between cabinet members Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. During the French Revolution, he proclaimed a policy of neutrality while sanctioning the Jay Treaty. He set enduring precedents for the office of president, including the title "Mr. President", and his Farewell Address is widely regarded as a pre-eminent statement on republicanism.

Washington owned slaves, and, in order to preserve national unity, he supported measures passed by Congress to protect slavery. He later became troubled with the institution of slavery and freed his slaves in a 1799 will. He endeavored to assimilate Native Americans into Anglo-American culture but combated indigenous resistance during occasions of violent conflict. He was a member of the Anglican Church and the Freemasons, and he urged broad religious freedom in his roles as general and president. Upon his death, he was eulogized as "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his

George Washington



Portrait based on the unfinished *Athenaeum Portrait* by Gilbert Stuart, 1796

1st President of the United States

In office

April 30, 1789^[a] – March 4, 1797

Vice President John Adams

Preceded by Office established

Succeeded by John Adams

7th Senior Officer of the United States Army

In office

July 13, 1798 – December 14, 1799

President John Adams

Preceded by James Wilkinson

Succeeded by Alexander Hamilton

Commander in Chief of the Continental Army

In office

June 19, 1775^[2] – December 23, 1783

Appointed by Continental Congress

Preceded by Office established


Succeeded by Henry Knox (as Senior Officer)

Delegate from Virginia to the Continental Congress

In office

countrymen". He has been memorialized by monuments, art, geographical locations, stamps, and currency, and many scholars and polls rank him among the greatest U.S. presidents.

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September 5, 1774 – June 16, 1775	
Preceded by	Office established
Succeeded by	Thomas Jefferson
Member of the Virginia House of Burgesses	
In office	
July 24, 1758 ^{[3][4]} – June 24, 1775 ^[5]	
Preceded by	Hugh West ^{[6][7]}
Succeeded by	Office abolished
Constituency	Frederick County (1758–1765)
	Fairfax County (1765–1775)^[5]
Personal details	
Born	February 22, 1732 <div>Popes Creek, Virginia, British America</div>
Died	December 14, 1799 (aged 67) <div>Mount Vernon, Virginia, U.S.</div>
Cause of death	Epiglottitis
Resting place	Mount Vernon, Virginia, U.S. <div>38°42′28.4″N 77°05′09.9″W</div>
Political party	Independent
Spouse(s)	Martha Dandridge (m. 1759)
Children	John Parke Custis (adopted)
Parents	Augustine Washington
	Mary Ball Washington
Relatives	Washington family
Residence	Mount Vernon, Virginia, U.S.
Awards	Congressional Gold Medal
	Thanks of Congress^[8]
Signature	
Military service	
Allegiance	Great Britain
	United States
Branch/service	Colonial militia
	Virginia Regiment
	Continental Army
	United States Army

surveyor of Culpeper County, Virginia, and he thus familiarized himself with the frontier region, resigning from the job in 1750. By 1752 he had bought almost 1,500 acres (600 ha) in the Valley and owned 2,315 acres (937 ha).^[19]

In 1751 Washington made his only trip abroad when he accompanied Lawrence to Barbados, hoping the climate would cure his brother's tuberculosis.^[20] Washington contracted smallpox during that trip, which immunized him but left his face slightly scarred.^[21] Lawrence died in 1752, and Washington leased Mount Vernon from his widow; he inherited it outright after her death in 1761.^[22]

Colonial military career (1752–1758)

Lawrence Washington's service as adjutant general of the Virginia militia inspired George to seek a commission. Virginia's Lieutenant Governor Robert Dinwiddie appointed him as a major and as commander of one of the four militia districts. The British and French were competing for control of the Ohio Valley at the time, the British building forts along the Ohio River and the French doing likewise between the river and Lake Erie.^[23]

In October 1753, Dinwiddie appointed Washington as a special envoy to demand that the French vacate territory which the British had claimed.^[d] Dinwiddie also appointed him to make peace with the Iroquois Confederacy and to gather intelligence about the French forces.^[25] Washington met with Half-King Tanacharison and other Iroquois chiefs at Logstown to secure their promise of support against the French, and his party reached the Ohio River in November. They were intercepted by a French patrol and escorted to Fort Le Boeuf where Washington was received in a friendly manner. He delivered the British demand to vacate to French commander Saint-Pierre, but the French refused to leave. Saint-Pierre gave Washington his official answer in a sealed envelope after a few days' delay, and he gave Washington's party food and extra winter clothing for the trip back to Virginia.^[26] Washington completed the precarious mission in 77 days in difficult winter conditions, achieving a measure of distinction when his report was published in Virginia and in London.^[27]

French and Indian War

In February 1754, Dinwiddie promoted Washington to lieutenant colonel and second-in-command of the 300-strong Virginia Regiment, with orders to confront French forces at the Forks of the Ohio.^[28] Washington set out for the Forks with half the regiment in April but soon learned a French force of 1,000 had begun construction of Fort Duquesne there. In May, having set up a defensive position at Great Meadows, he learned that the French had made camp seven miles (11 km) away; he decided to take the offensive.^[29]



Lieutenant Colonel Washington holds night council at Fort Necessity

The French detachment proved to be only about fifty men, so Washington advanced on May 28 with a small force of Virginians and Indian allies to ambush them.^{[30][e]} What took place, known as the Battle of Jumonville Glen or the Jumonville affair, was disputed, but French forces were killed outright with muskets and hatchets. French commander Joseph Coulon de Jumonville, who carried a diplomatic message for the British to evacuate, was killed. French forces found Jumonville and some of his men dead and scalped and assumed Washington was responsible.^[32] Washington blamed his translator for not communicating the

French intentions.^[33] Dinwiddie congratulated Washington for his victory over the French.^[34] This incident ignited the French and Indian War, which later became part of the larger Seven Years' War.^[35]

The full Virginia Regiment joined Washington at Fort Necessity the following month with news that he had been promoted to command of the regiment and to colonel upon the death of the regimental commander. The regiment was reinforced by an independent company of 100 South Carolinians led by Captain James Mackay, whose royal commission outranked that of Washington, and a conflict of command ensued. On July 3, a French force attacked with 900 men, and the ensuing battle ended in Washington's surrender.^[36] In the aftermath, Colonel James Innes took command of intercolonial forces, the Virginia Regiment was divided, and Washington was offered a captaincy which he refused, with resignation of his commission.^[37]

In 1755, Washington served voluntarily as an aide to General Edward Braddock, who led a British expedition to expel the French from Fort Duquesne and the Ohio Country.^[38] On Washington's recommendation, Braddock split the army into one main column and a lightly equipped "flying column".^[39] Suffering from a severe case of dysentery, Washington was left behind, and when he rejoined Braddock at Monongahela the French and their Indian allies ambushed the divided army. The British suffered two-thirds casualties, including the mortally wounded Braddock. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gage, Washington, still very ill, rallied the survivors and formed a rear guard, allowing the remnants of the force to disengage and retreat.^[40] During the engagement he had two horses shot from under him, and his hat and coat were bullet-pierced.^[41] His conduct under fire redeemed his reputation among critics of his command in the Battle of Fort Necessity,^[42] but he was not included by the succeeding commander (Colonel Thomas Dunbar) in planning subsequent operations.^[43]



Washington the Soldier

Lieutenant Colonel Washington on horseback during the Battle of the Monongahela (oil, Reénier, 1834)

The Virginia Regiment was reconstituted in August 1755, and Dinwiddie appointed Washington its commander, again with the colonial rank of colonel. Washington clashed over seniority almost immediately, this time with John Dagworthy, another captain of superior royal rank, who commanded a detachment of Marylanders at the regiment's headquarters in Fort Cumberland.^[44] Washington, impatient for an offensive against Fort Duquesne, was convinced Braddock would have granted him a royal commission and pressed his case in February 1756 with Braddock's successor, William Shirley, and again in January 1757 with Shirley's successor, Lord Loudoun. Shirley ruled in Washington's favor only in the matter of Dagworthy; Loudoun humiliated Washington, refused him a royal commission and agreed only to relieve him of the responsibility of manning Fort Cumberland.^[45]

In 1758, the Virginia Regiment was assigned to Britain's Forbes Expedition to take Fort Duquesne.^{[46][f]} Washington disagreed with General John Forbes' tactics and chosen route.^[48] Forbes nevertheless made Washington a brevet brigadier general and gave him command of one of the three brigades that would assault the fort. The French abandoned the fort and the valley before the assault was launched; Washington saw only a friendly-fire incident which left 14 dead and 26 injured. The war lasted another four years, but Washington resigned his commission and returned to Mount Vernon.^[49]

Under Washington, the Virginia Regiment had defended 300 miles (480 km) of frontier against twenty Indian attacks in ten months.^[50] He increased the professionalism of the regiment as it increased from 300 to 1,000 men, and Virginia's frontier population suffered less than other colonies. Some historians have said this was Washington's "only unqualified success" during the war.^[51] Though he failed to realize a royal commission, he did gain self-confidence, leadership skills, and invaluable knowledge of British tactics. The destructive competition Washington witnessed among colonial politicians fostered his later support of strong central government.^[52]

Marriage, civilian, and political life (1759–1775)

On January 6, 1759, Washington, at age 26, married Martha Dandridge Custis, the 27-year-old widow of wealthy plantation owner Daniel Parke Custis. The marriage took place at Martha's estate; she was intelligent, gracious, and experienced in managing a planter's estate, and the couple created a happy marriage.^[53] They raised John Parke Custis (Jacky) and Martha Parke (Patsy) Custis, children from her previous marriage, and later their grandchildren Eleanor Parke Custis (Nelly) and George Washington Parke Custis (Washy). Washington's 1751 bout with smallpox is thought to have rendered him sterile, though it is equally likely "Martha may have sustained injury during the birth of Patsy, her final child, making additional births impossible."^[54] They lamented the fact that they had no children together.^[55] They moved to Mount Vernon, near Alexandria, where he took up life as a planter of tobacco and wheat and emerged as a political figure.^[56]



Colonel George Washington,
by Charles Willson Peale,
1772

The marriage gave Washington control over Martha's one-third dower interest in the 18,000-acre (7,300 ha) Custis estate, and he managed the remaining two-thirds for Martha's children; the estate also included 84 slaves. He became one of Virginia's wealthiest men, which increased his social standing.^[57]

At Washington's urging, Governor Lord Botetourt fulfilled Dinwiddie's 1754 promise of land bounties to all volunteer militia during the French and Indian War.^[58] In late 1770, Washington inspected the lands in the Ohio and Great Kanawha regions, and he engaged surveyor William Crawford to subdivide it. Crawford allotted 23,200 acres (9,400 ha) to Washington; Washington told the veterans that their land was hilly and unsuitable for farming, and he agreed to purchase 20,147 acres (8,153 ha), leaving some feeling they had been duped.^[59] He also doubled the size of Mount Vernon to 6,500 acres (2,600 ha) and increased its slave population to more than a hundred by 1775.^[60]

As a respected military hero and large landowner, Washington held local offices and was elected to the Virginia provincial legislature, representing Frederick County in the House of Burgesses for seven years beginning in 1758.^[60] He plied the voters with beer, brandy, and other beverages, although he was absent while serving on the Forbes Expedition.^[61] He won election with roughly 40 percent of the vote, defeating three other candidates with the help of several local supporters. He rarely spoke in his early legislative career, but he became a prominent critic of Britain's taxation and mercantilist policies in the 1760s.^[62]

By occupation, Washington was a planter, and he imported luxuries and other goods from England, paying for them by exporting tobacco.^[63] His profligate spending combined with low tobacco prices left him £1,800 in debt by 1764, prompting him to diversify.^[64] In 1765, because of erosion and other soil problems, he changed Mount Vernon's primary cash crop from tobacco to wheat and expanded

operations to include corn flour milling and fishing.^[65] Washington also took time for leisure with fox hunting, fishing, dances, theater, cards, backgammon, and billiards.^[66]

Washington soon was counted among the political and social elite in Virginia. From 1768 to 1775, he invited some 2,000 guests to his Mount Vernon estate, mostly those whom he considered "people of rank". He became more politically active in 1769, presenting legislation in the Virginia Assembly to establish an embargo on goods from Great Britain.^[67]

Washington's step-daughter Patsy Custis suffered from epileptic attacks from age 12, and she died in his arms in 1773. The following day, he wrote to Burwell Bassett: "It is easier to conceive, than to describe, the distress of this Family".^[68] He canceled all business activity and remained with Martha every night for three months.^[69]



Martha Washington
based on a 1757 portrait by
John Wollaston

Opposition to British Parliament

Washington played a central role before and during the American Revolution. His disdain for the British military had begun when he was abashedly passed over for promotion into the Regular Army. Opposed to taxes imposed by the British Parliament on the Colonies without proper representation,^[70] he and other colonists were also angered by the Royal Proclamation of 1763 which banned American settlement west of the Allegheny Mountains and protected the British fur trade.^[71]

Washington believed the Stamp Act of 1765 was an "Act of Oppression", and he celebrated its repeal the following year.^[8] In March 1766, Parliament passed the Declaratory Act asserting that Parliamentary law superseded colonial law.^[73] Washington helped lead widespread protests against the Townshend Acts passed by Parliament in 1767, and he introduced a proposal in May 1769 drafted by George Mason which called Virginians to boycott English goods; the Acts were mostly repealed in 1770.^[74]

Parliament sought to punish Massachusetts colonists for their role in the Boston Tea Party in 1774 by passing the Coercive Acts, which Washington referred to as "an invasion of our rights and privileges".^[75] He said Americans must not submit to acts of tyranny since "custom and use shall make us as tame and abject slaves, as the blacks we rule over with such arbitrary sway".^[76] That July, he and George Mason drafted a list of resolutions for the Fairfax County committee which Washington chaired, and the committee adopted the Fairfax Resolves calling for a Continental Congress.^[77] On August 1, Washington attended the First Virginia Convention, where he was selected as a delegate to the First Continental Congress.^[78] As tensions rose in 1774, he helped train county militias in Virginia and organized enforcement of the Continental Association boycott of British goods instituted by the Congress.^[79]

The American Revolutionary War began on April 19, 1775, with the Battles of Lexington and Concord and the Siege of Boston.^[80] The colonists were divided over breaking away from British rule and split into two factions: Patriots who rejected British rule, and Loyalists who desired to remain subject to the King.^[81] General Thomas Gage was commander of British forces in America at the beginning of the war.^[82] Upon hearing the shocking news of the onset of war, Washington was "sobered and dismayed",^[83] and he hastily departed Mount Vernon on May 4, 1775, to join the Continental Congress in Philadelphia.^[84]

Commander in chief (1775–1783)

Congress created the Continental Army on June 14, 1775, and Samuel and John Adams nominated Washington to become its commander in chief. Washington was chosen over John Hancock because of his military experience and the belief that a Virginian would better unite the colonies. He was considered an incisive leader who kept his "ambition in check".^[85] He was unanimously elected commander in chief by Congress the next day.^[86]

Washington appeared before Congress in uniform and gave an acceptance speech on June 16, declining a salary—though he was later reimbursed expenses. He was commissioned on June 19 and was roundly praised by Congressional delegates, including John Adams, who proclaimed that he was the man best suited to lead and unite the colonies.^{[87][88]} Congress appointed Washington "General & Commander in chief of the army of the United Colonies and of all the forces raised or to be raised by them", and instructed him to take charge of the siege of Boston on June 22, 1775.^[89]



General Washington
Commander of the
Continental Army by
Charles Willson Peale
(1776)

Congress chose his primary staff officers, including Major General Artemas Ward, Adjutant General Horatio Gates, Major General Charles Lee, Major General Philip Schuyler, Major General Nathanael Greene, Colonel Henry Knox, and Colonel Alexander Hamilton.^[90] Washington was impressed by Colonel Benedict Arnold and gave him responsibility for invading Canada. He also engaged French and Indian War compatriot Brigadier General Daniel Morgan. Henry Knox impressed Adams with ordnance knowledge, and Washington promoted him to colonel and chief of artillery.^[91]

Washington initially protested enlistment of slaves in the Continental Army, but later he relented when the British emancipated and used theirs.^[92] On January 16, 1776, Congress allowed free blacks to serve in the militia. By the end of the war one-tenth of Washington's army were blacks.^[93]

Siege of Boston



Washington taking command of the
Continental Army, just before the
siege

Early in 1775, in response to the growing rebellious movement, London sent British troops, commanded by General Thomas Gage, to occupy Boston. They set up fortifications about the city, making it impervious to attack. Various local militias surrounded the city and effectively trapped the British, resulting in a standoff.^[94]

As Washington headed for Boston, word of his march preceded him, and he was greeted everywhere; gradually he became a symbol of the Patriot cause.^{[95][h]} Upon arrival on July 2, 1775, two weeks after the Patriot defeat at nearby Bunker Hill, he set up his Cambridge, Massachusetts headquarters and inspected the new army there, only to find an undisciplined and badly outfitted militia.^[96] After

consultation, he initiated Benjamin Franklin's suggested reforms—drilling the soldiers and imposing strict discipline, floggings, and incarceration.^[97] Washington ordered his officers to identify the skills of recruits to ensure military effectiveness, while removing incompetent officers.^[98] He petitioned Gage, his former superior, to release captured Patriot officers from prison and treat them humanely.^[99] In October 1775, King George III declared that the colonies were in open rebellion and relieved General Gage of command for incompetence, replacing him with General William Howe.^[100]

In June 1775, Congress ordered an invasion of Canada. It was led by Benedict Arnold, who, despite Washington's strong objection, drew volunteers from the latter's force during the Siege of Boston. The move on Quebec failed, with the American forces being reduced to less than half and forced to retreat.^[101]

The Continental Army, further diminished by expiring short-term enlistments, and by January 1776 reduced by half to 9,600 men, had to be supplemented with militia, and was joined by Knox with heavy artillery captured from Fort Ticonderoga.^[102] When the Charles River froze over Washington was eager to cross and storm Boston, but General Gates and others were opposed to untrained militia striking well-garrisoned fortifications. Washington reluctantly agreed to secure Dorchester Heights, 100 feet above Boston, in an attempt to force the British out of the city.^[103] On March 9, under cover of darkness, Washington's troops brought up Knox's big guns and bombarded British ships in Boston harbor. On March 17 9,000 British troops and Loyalists began a chaotic ten-day evacuation of Boston aboard 120 ships. Soon after, Washington entered the city with 500 men, with explicit orders not to plunder the city. He ordered vaccinations against smallpox to great effect, as he did later in Morristown, New Jersey.^[104] He refrained from exerting military authority in Boston, leaving civilian matters in the hands of local authorities.^{[105][i]}

Battle of Long Island

Washington then proceeded to New York City, arriving on April 13, 1776, and began constructing fortifications there to thwart the expected British attack. He ordered his occupying forces to treat civilians and their property with respect, to avoid the abuse suffered by civilians in Boston at the hands of British troops.^[107] A plot to assassinate or capture him was discovered but it failed, though his bodyguard Thomas Hickey was hanged for mutiny and sedition.^[108] General Howe transported his resupplied army, with the British fleet, from Halifax to New York, knowing the city was key to securing the continent. George Germain, who ran the British war effort in England, believed it could be won with one "decisive blow".^[109] The British forces, including more than a hundred ships and thousands of troops, began arriving on Staten Island on July 2 to lay siege to the city.^[110] After the Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, Washington informed his troops in his general orders of July 9 that Congress had declared the united colonies to be "free and independent states".^[111]



Battle of Long Island
Alonzo Chappel (1858)

Howe's troop strength totaled 32,000 regulars and Hessians, and Washington's consisted of 23,000, mostly raw recruits and militia.^[112] In August, Howe landed 20,000 troops at Gravesend, Brooklyn, and approached Washington's fortifications, as King George III proclaimed the rebellious American colonists to be traitors.^[113] Washington, opposing his generals, chose to fight, based upon inaccurate information that Howe's army had only 8,000-plus troops.^[114] In the Battle of Long Island, Howe assaulted Washington's flank and inflicted 1,500 Patriot casualties, the British suffering 400.^[115] Washington retreated, instructing General William Heath to acquisition river craft in the area. On August 30, General William Alexander held off the British and gave cover while the army crossed the East River under darkness to Manhattan Island without loss of life or materiel, although Alexander was captured.^[116]

Howe, emboldened by his Long Island victory, dispatched Washington as "George Washington, Esq.", in futility to negotiate peace. Washington declined, demanding to be addressed with diplomatic protocol, as general and fellow belligerent, not as a "rebel", lest his men be hanged as such if captured.^[117] The

British navy bombarded the unstable earthworks on lower Manhattan Island.^[118] Washington, with misgivings, heeded the advice of Generals Greene and Putnam to defend Fort Washington. They were unable to hold it, and Washington abandoned it despite General Lee's objections, as his army retired north to White Plains.^[119] Howe's pursuit forced Washington to retreat across the Hudson River to Fort Lee to avoid encirclement. Howe landed his troops on Manhattan in November and captured Fort Washington, inflicting high casualties on the Americans. Washington was responsible for delaying the retreat, though he blamed Congress and General Greene. Loyalists in New York considered Howe a liberator and spread a rumor that Washington had set fire to the city.^[120] Patriot morale reached its lowest when Lee was captured.^[121] Now reduced to 5,400 troops, Washington's army retreated through New Jersey, and Howe broke off pursuit, delaying his advance on Philadelphia, and set up winter quarters in New York.^[122]

Crossing the Delaware, Trenton, and Princeton

Washington crossed the Delaware River into Pennsylvania, where Lee's replacement John Sullivan joined him with 2,000 more troops.^[124] The future of the Continental Army was in doubt for lack of supplies, a harsh winter, expiring enlistments, and desertions. Washington was disappointed that many New Jersey residents were Loyalists or skeptical about the prospect of independence.^[125]

Howe split up his British Army and posted a Hessian garrison at Trenton to hold western New Jersey and the east shore of the Delaware,^[126] but the army appeared complacent, and Washington and his generals devised a surprise attack on the Hessians at Trenton, which he codenamed "Victory or Death".^[127] The army was to cross the Delaware River to Trenton in three divisions: one led by Washington (2,400 troops), another by General James Ewing (700), and the third by Colonel John Cadwalader (1,500). The force was to then split, with Washington taking the Pennington Road and General Sullivan traveling south on the river's edge.^[128]

Washington first ordered a 60-mile search for Durham boats, to transport his army, and he ordered the destruction of vessels that could be used by the British.^[129] He crossed the Delaware River on the night of December 25–26, 1776, and risked capture staking out the Jersey shoreline. His men followed across the ice-obstructed river in sleet and snow from McConkey's Ferry, with 40 men per vessel. Wind churned up the waters, and they were pelted with hail, but by 3:00 a.m. on December 26, they made it across with no losses.^[130] Henry Knox was delayed, managing frightened horses and about 18 field guns on flat-bottomed ferries. Cadwalader and Ewing failed to cross due to the ice and heavy currents, and a waiting Washington doubted his planned attack on Trenton. Once Knox arrived, Washington proceeded to Trenton, to take only his troops against the Hessians, rather than risk being spotted returning his army to Pennsylvania.^[131]

The troops spotted Hessian positions a mile from Trenton, so Washington split his force into two columns, rallying his men: "Soldiers keep by your officers. For God's sake, keep by your officers." The two columns were separated at the Birmingham crossroads, with General Nathanael Greene's column taking the upper Ferry Road, led by Washington, and General John Sullivan's advancing on River Road.



Washington Crossing the Delaware,
Emanuel Leutze (1851)^[1]



The Passage of the Delaware, by
Thomas Sully, 1819 (Museum of
Fine Arts, Boston)

(See map.)^[132] The Americans marched in sleet and snowfall. Many were shoeless with bloodied feet, and two died of exposure. At sunrise, Washington led them in a surprise attack on the Hessians, aided by Major General Knox and artillery. The Hessians had 22 killed (including Colonel Johann Rall), 83 wounded, and 850 captured with supplies.^[133]

Washington retreated across the Delaware to Pennsylvania but returned to New Jersey on January 3, launching an attack on British regulars at Princeton, with 40 Americans killed or wounded and 273 British killed or captured.^[134] American Generals Hugh Mercer and John Cadwalader were being driven back by the British when Mercer was mortally wounded, then Washington arrived and led the men in a counterattack which advanced to within 30 yards (27 m) of the British line.^[135]

Some British troops retreated after a brief stand, while others took refuge in Nassau Hall, which became the target of Colonel Alexander Hamilton's cannons. Washington's troops charged, the British surrendered in less than an hour, and 194 soldiers laid down their arms.^[136] Howe retreated to New York City where his army remained inactive until early the next year.^[137] Washington's depleted Continental Army took up winter headquarters in Morristown, New Jersey while disrupting British supply lines and expelling them from parts of New Jersey. Washington later said the British could have successfully counterattacked his encampment before his troops were dug in.^[138]

The British still controlled New York, and many Patriot soldiers did not re-enlist or deserted after the harsh winter campaign. Congress instituted greater rewards for re-enlisting and punishments for desertion in an effort to effect greater troop numbers.^[139] Strategically, Washington's victories were pivotal for the Revolution and quashed the British strategy of showing overwhelming force followed by offering generous terms.^[140] In February 1777, word reached London of the American victories at Trenton and Princeton, and the British realized the Patriots were in a position to demand unconditional independence.^[141]

Brandywine, Germantown, and Saratoga

In July 1777, British General John Burgoyne led the Saratoga campaign south from Quebec through Lake Champlain and recaptured Fort Ticonderoga with the objective of dividing New England, including control of the Hudson River. But General Howe in British-occupied New York blundered, taking his army south to Philadelphia rather than up the Hudson River to join Burgoyne near Albany.^[142] Meanwhile, Washington and Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette rushed to Philadelphia to engage Howe and were shocked to learn of Burgoyne's progress in upstate New York, where the Patriots were led by General Philip Schuyler and successor Horatio Gates. Washington's army of less experienced men were defeated in the pitched battles at Philadelphia.^[143]

Howe outmaneuvered Washington at the Battle of Brandywine on September 11, 1777, and marched unopposed into the nation's capital at Philadelphia. A Patriot attack failed against the British at Germantown in October. Major General Thomas Conway prompted some members of Congress (referred to as the Conway Cabal) to consider removing Washington from command because of the losses incurred at Philadelphia. Washington's supporters resisted and the matter was finally dropped after much deliberation.^[144] Once exposed, Conway wrote an apology to Washington, resigned, and returned to France.^[145]



The Capture of the Hessians at Trenton, December 26, 1776
by John Trumbull

Washington was concerned with Howe's movements during the Saratoga campaign to the north, and he was also aware that Burgoyne was moving south toward Saratoga from Quebec. Washington took some risks to support Gates' army, sending reinforcements north with Generals Benedict Arnold, his most aggressive field commander, and Benjamin Lincoln. On October 7, 1777, Burgoyne tried to take Bemis Heights but was isolated from support by Howe. He was forced to retreat to Saratoga and ultimately surrendered after the Battles of Saratoga. As Washington suspected, Gates' victory emboldened his critics.^[146] Biographer John Alden maintains, "It was inevitable that the defeats of Washington's forces and the concurrent victory of the forces in upper New York should be compared." The admiration for Washington was waning, including little credit from John Adams.^[147] British commander Howe resigned in May 1778, left America forever, and was replaced by Sir Henry Clinton.^[148]

Valley Forge and Monmouth



Washington and Lafayette at Valley Forge, by John Ward Dunsmore (1907)

Washington's army of 11,000 went into winter quarters at Valley Forge north of Philadelphia in December 1777. They suffered between 2,000 and 3,000 deaths in the extreme cold over six months, mostly from disease and lack of food, clothing, and shelter.^[149] Meanwhile, the British were comfortably quartered in Philadelphia, paying for supplies in pounds sterling, while Washington struggled with a devalued American paper currency. The woodlands were soon exhausted of game, and by February morale and increased desertions ensued.^[150]

Washington made repeated petitions to the Continental Congress for provisions. He received a congressional delegation to check the Army's conditions, and expressed the urgency of the situation, proclaiming: "Something must be done. Important alterations must

be made." He recommended that Congress expedite supplies, and Congress agreed to strengthen and fund the army's supply lines by reorganizing the commissary department. By late February, supplies began arriving.^[106]

Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben's incessant drilling soon transformed Washington's recruits into a disciplined fighting force,^[151] and the revitalized army emerged from Valley Forge early the following year.^[152] Washington promoted Von Steuben to Major General and made him chief of staff.^[153]

In early 1778, the French responded to Burgoyne's defeat and entered into a Treaty of Alliance with the Americans. The Continental Congress ratified the treaty in May, which amounted to a French declaration of war against Britain.^[154] The British evacuated Philadelphia for New York that June and Washington summoned a war council of American and French Generals. He chose a partial attack on the retreating British at the Battle of Monmouth; the British were commanded by Howe's successor General Henry Clinton. Generals Charles Lee and Lafayette moved with 4,000 men, without Washington's knowledge, and bungled their first attack on June 28. Washington relieved Lee and achieved a draw after an expansive battle. At nightfall, the British continued their retreat to New York, and Washington moved his army outside the city.^[155] Monmouth was Washington's last battle in the North; he valued the safety of his army more than towns with little value to the British.^[156]



Washington Rallying the Troops at Monmouth, Emanuel Leutze (1851–1854)

West Point espionage

Washington became "America's first spymaster" by designing an espionage system against the British.^[157] In 1778, Major Benjamin Tallmadge formed the Culper Ring at Washington's direction to covertly collect information about the British in New York.^[158] Washington had disregarded incidents of disloyalty by Benedict Arnold, who had distinguished himself in many battles.^[159]

During mid-1780, Arnold began supplying British spymaster John André with sensitive information intended to compromise Washington and capture West Point, a key American defensive position on the Hudson River.^[160] Historians have noted several possible reasons for Arnold's treachery: his anger at losing promotions to junior officers, the repeated slights from Congress. He was also deeply in debt, had been profiteering from the war and was disappointed by Washington's lack of support during his resultant court-martial.^[161]

Arnold repeatedly asked for command of West Point, and Washington finally agreed in August.^[162] Arnold met André on September 21, giving him plans to take over the garrison.^[163] Militia forces captured André and discovered the plans, but Arnold escaped to New York.^[164] Washington recalled the commanders positioned under Arnold at key points around the fort to prevent any complicity, but he did not suspect Arnold's wife Peggy. Washington assumed personal command at West Point and reorganized its defenses.^[165] André's trial for espionage ended in a death sentence, and Washington offered to return him to the British in exchange for Arnold, but Clinton refused. André was hanged on October 2, 1780, despite his request to face a firing squad, in order to deter other spies.^[166]

Southern theater and Yorktown

In late 1778, General Clinton shipped 3,000 troops from New York to Georgia and launched a Southern invasion against Savannah, reinforced by 2,000 British and Loyalist troops. They repelled an attack by Patriots and French naval forces, which bolstered the British war effort.^[167]

In mid-1779, Washington attacked Iroquois warriors of the Six Nations in order to force Britain's Indian allies out of New York, from which they had assaulted New England towns.^[168] The Indian warriors joined with Tory rangers led by Walter Butler and viciously slew more than 200 frontiersmen in June, laying waste to the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania.^[169] In response, Washington ordered General John Sullivan to lead an expedition to effect "the total destruction and devastation" of Iroquois villages and take their women and children hostage. Those who managed to escape fled to Canada.^[170]

Washington's troops went into quarters at Morristown, New Jersey during the winter of 1779–1780 and suffered their worst winter of the war, with temperatures well below freezing. New York Harbor was frozen over, snow and ice covered the ground for weeks, and the troops again lacked provisions.^[171]

Clinton assembled 12,500 troops and attacked Charlestown, South Carolina in January 1780, defeating General Benjamin Lincoln who had only 5,100 Continental troops.^[172] The British went on to occupy the South Carolina Piedmont in June, with no Patriot resistance. Clinton returned to New York and left 8,000 troops commanded by General Charles Cornwallis.^[173] Congress replaced Lincoln with Horatio Gates; he failed in South Carolina and was replaced by Washington's choice of Nathaniel Greene, but the



French King Louis XVI
allied with Washington and
Patriot American colonists

British already had the South in their grasp. Washington was reinvigorated, however, when Lafayette returned from France with more ships, men, and supplies,^[174] and 5,000 veteran French troops led by Marshal Rochambeau arrived at Newport, Rhode Island in July 1780.^[175] French naval forces then landed, led by Admiral Grasse, and Washington encouraged Rochambeau to move his fleet south to launch a joint land and naval attack on Arnold's troops.^[176]

Washington's army went into winter quarters at New Windsor, New York in December 1780, and Washington urged Congress and state officials to expedite provisions in hopes that the army would not "continue to struggle under the same difficulties they have hitherto endured".^[177] On March 1, 1781, Congress ratified the Articles of Confederation, but the government that took effect on March 2 did not have the power to levy taxes, and it loosely held the states together.^[178]

General Clinton sent Benedict Arnold, now a British Brigadier General with 1,700 troops, to Virginia to capture Portsmouth and to spread terror from there; Washington responded by sending Lafayette south to counter Arnold's efforts.^[179] Washington initially hoped to bring the fight to New York, drawing off British forces from Virginia and ending the war there, but Rochambeau advised Grasse that Cornwallis in Virginia was the better target. Grasse's fleet arrived off the Virginia coast and Washington saw the advantage. He made a feint towards Clinton in New York, then headed south to Virginia.^[180]

The Siege of Yorktown, Virginia was a decisive allied victory by the combined forces of the Continental Army commanded by General Washington, the French Army commanded by the General Comte de Rochambeau, and the French Navy commanded by Admiral de Grasse, in the defeat of Cornwallis' British forces. On August 19, the march to Yorktown led by Washington and Rochambeau began, which is known now as the "celebrated march".^[181] Washington was in command of an army of 7,800 Frenchmen, 3,100 militia, and 8,000 Continentals. Lacking in experience in siege warfare, Washington often deferred judgment to Rochambeau, effectively putting him in command; however, Rochambeau never challenged Washington's authority.^[182]



Siege of Yorktown, Generals Washington and Rochambeau give last orders before the attack

By late September, Patriot-French forces completely surrounded Yorktown, trapped the British army, and prevented British reinforcements from Clinton in the North, while the French Navy was victorious at the Battle of the Chesapeake. The final American offensive was begun with a shot fired by Washington.^[183] The siege ended with a British surrender on October 19, 1781; over 7,000 British soldiers were captured, in the last major land battle of the American Revolutionary War.^[184] Washington negotiated the terms of surrender for two days, and the official signing ceremony took place on October 19; Cornwallis, in fact, claimed illness and was absent, sending General Charles O'Hara as his proxy.^[185] As a gesture of goodwill, Washington held a dinner for the American, French, and British generals, all of whom fraternized on friendly terms and identified with one another as members of the same professional military caste.^[186]

After the surrender at Yorktown, a situation developed that threatened relations between the new American nation and Britain. Following a series of retributive executions between Patriots and Loyalists, Washington, on May 18, 1782, wrote in a letter to General Moses Hazen^[187] that a British Captain would be executed for the execution of Joshua Huddy a popular patriot leader among volunteers, who was hanged at the direction of Loyalist Captain Lippincott. Washington wanted Lippincott himself to be executed but was declined.^[188] Subsequently, Charles Asgill was chosen instead, by a drawing of lots from a hat. This was a violation of the 14th article of the Yorktown Articles of Capitulation, which protected prisoners of war from acts of retaliation.^{[187][189]} Later, Washington's feelings on matters

changed and in a letter of November 13, 1782, to Asgill, he acknowledged Asgill's letter and situation, expressing his desire not to see any harm come to him.^[190] After much consideration between the Continental Congress, Alexander Hamilton, Washington, and appeals from the French Crown, Asgill was finally released,^[191] where Washington issued Asgill a pass that allowed his passage to New York.^{[192][187]}

Demobilization and resignation



General George Washington Resigning His Commission, by John Trumbull, 1824

As peace negotiations started, the British gradually evacuated troops from Savannah, Charlestown, and New York by 1783, and the French army and navy likewise departed.^[193] The American treasury was empty, unpaid and mutinous soldiers forced the adjournment of Congress, and Washington dispelled unrest by suppressing the Newburgh Conspiracy in March 1783; Congress promised officers a five-year bonus.^[194] Washington submitted an account of \$450,000 in expenses which he had advanced to the army. The account was settled, though it was allegedly vague about large sums and included expenses his wife had incurred through visits to his headquarters.^[195]

Washington resigned as commander-in-chief once the Treaty of Paris was signed, and he planned to retire to Mount Vernon. The treaty was ratified in April 1783, and Hamilton's Congressional committee adapted the army for peacetime. Washington gave the Army's perspective to the committee in his *Sentiments on a Peace Establishment*.^[196] The Treaty was signed on September 3, 1783, and Great Britain officially recognized the independence of the United States. Washington then disbanded his army, giving an eloquent farewell address to his soldiers on November 2.^[197] On November 25, the British evacuated New York City, and Washington and Governor George Clinton took possession.^[198]

Washington advised Congress in August 1783 to keep a standing army, create a "national militia" of separate state units, and establish a navy and a national military academy. He circulated his "Farewell" orders that discharged his troops, whom he called "one patriotic band of brothers". Before his return to Mount Vernon, he oversaw the evacuation of British forces in New York and was greeted by parades and celebrations, where he announced that Knox had been promoted commander-in-chief.^[199]

After leading the Continental Army for 8½ years, Washington bade farewell to his officers at Fraunces Tavern in December 1783, and resigned his commission days later, refuting Loyalist predictions that he would not relinquish his military command.^[200] In a final appearance in uniform, he gave a statement to the Congress: "I consider it an indispensable duty to close this last solemn act of my official life, by commending the interests of our dearest country to the protection of Almighty God, and those who have the superintendence of them, to his holy keeping."^[201] Washington's resignation was acclaimed at home and abroad and showed a skeptical world that the new republic would not degenerate into chaos.^{[202][k]} The same month, Washington was appointed president-general of the Society of the Cincinnati, a hereditary fraternity, and he served for the remainder of his life.^{[204][l]}

Early republic (1783–1789)

Return to Mount Vernon

Washington was longing to return home after spending just 10 days at Mount Vernon out of 8½ years of war. He arrived on Christmas Eve, delighted to be "free of the bustle of a camp and the busy scenes of public life".^[207] He was a celebrity and was fêted during a visit to his mother at Fredericksburg in February 1784, and he received a constant stream of visitors wishing to pay their respects to him at Mount Vernon.^[208]

Washington reactivated his interests in the Great Dismal Swamp and Potomac canal projects begun before the war, though neither paid him any dividends, and he undertook a 34-day, 680 miles (1,090 km) trip to check on his land holdings in the Ohio Country.^[209] He oversaw the completion of the remodeling work at Mount Vernon which transformed his residence into the mansion that survives to this day—although his financial situation was not strong. Creditors paid him in depreciated wartime currency, and he owed significant amounts in taxes and wages. Mount Vernon had made no profit during his absence, and he saw persistently poor crop yields due to pestilence and poor weather. His estate recorded its eleventh year running at a deficit in 1787, and there was little prospect of improvement.^[210] Washington undertook a new landscaping plan and succeeded in cultivating a range of fast-growing trees and shrubs that were native to North America.^[211]

I am not only retired from all public employments but I am retiring within myself, and shall be able to view the solitary walk and tread the paths of private life with heartfelt satisfaction ... I will move gently down the stream of life, until I sleep with my fathers.

George Washington
Letter to Lafayette
February 1, 1784^[206]

Constitutional Convention of 1787



Shays' Rebellion confirmed for Washington the need to overhaul the Articles of Confederation.

Before returning to private life in June 1783, Washington called for a strong union. Though he was concerned that he might be criticized for meddling in civil matters, he sent a circular letter to all the states maintaining that the Articles of Confederation was no more than "a rope of sand" linking the states. He believed the nation was on the verge of "anarchy and confusion", was vulnerable to foreign intervention and that a national constitution would unify the states under a strong central government.^[212] When Shays' Rebellion erupted in Massachusetts on August 29, 1786, over taxation, Washington was further convinced that a national constitution was needed.^[213] Some nationalists feared that the new republic had descended into lawlessness, and they met together on September 11, 1786, at Annapolis to ask Congress to revise the Articles of Confederation. One of their biggest efforts, however, was getting Washington to attend.^[214] Congress agreed to a Constitutional Convention to be held in Philadelphia in Spring 1787, and each state

was to send delegates.^[215]

On December 4, 1786, Washington was chosen to lead the Virginia delegation, but he declined on December 21. He had concerns about the legality of the convention and consulted James Madison, Henry Knox, and others. They persuaded him to attend it, however, as his presence might induce reluctant states to send delegates and smooth the way for the ratification process.^[216] On March 28, Washington told Governor Edmund Randolph that he would attend the convention, but made it clear that he was urged to attend.^[217]

Washington arrived in Philadelphia on May 9, 1787, though a quorum was not attained until Friday, May 25. Benjamin Franklin nominated Washington to preside over the convention, and he was unanimously elected to serve as president general.^[218] The convention's state-mandated purpose was to revise the Articles of Confederation with "all such alterations and further provisions" required to improve them, and the new government would be established when the resulting document was "duly confirmed by the several states".^[219] Governor Edmund Randolph of Virginia introduced Madison's Virginia Plan on May 27, the third day of the convention. It called for an entirely new constitution and a sovereign national government, which Washington highly recommended.^[220]



Scene at the Signing of the Constitution of the United States by Howard Chandler Christy, 1940. Washington is the presiding officer standing at right.

Washington wrote Alexander Hamilton on July 10: "I almost despair of seeing a favorable issue to the proceedings of our convention and do therefore repent having had any agency in the business."^[221] Nevertheless, he lent his prestige to the goodwill and work of the other delegates. He unsuccessfully lobbied many to support ratification of the Constitution, such as anti-federalist Patrick Henry; Washington told him "the adoption of it under the present circumstances of the Union is in my opinion desirable" and declared the alternative would be anarchy.^[222] Washington and Madison then spent four days at Mount Vernon evaluating the transition of the new government.^[223]

First presidential election

The delegates to the Convention anticipated a Washington presidency and left it to him to define the office once elected.^{[224][m]} The state electors under the Constitution voted for the president on February 4, 1789, and Washington suspected that most republicans had not voted for him.^[226] The mandated March 4 date passed without a Congressional quorum to count the votes, but a quorum was reached on April 5. The votes were tallied the next day,^[227] and Congressional Secretary Charles Thomson was sent to Mount Vernon to tell Washington he had been elected president. Washington won the majority of every state's electoral votes; John Adams received the next highest number of votes and therefore became vice president.^[228] Washington had "anxious and painful sensations" about leaving the "domestic felicity" of Mount Vernon, but departed for New York City on April 16 to be inaugurated.^[229]

Presidency (1789–1797)

Washington was inaugurated on April 30, 1789, taking the oath of office at Federal Hall in New York City.^{[230][n]} His coach was led by militia and a marching band and followed by statesmen and foreign dignitaries in an inaugural parade, with a crowd of 10,000.^[232] Chancellor Robert R. Livingston administered the oath, using a Bible provided by the Masons, after which the militia fired a 13-gun salute.^[233] Washington read a speech in the Senate Chamber, asking "that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations—and whose providential aids can supply every human defect, consecrate the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States".^[234] Though he wished to serve without a salary, Congress insisted adamantly that he accept it, later providing Washington \$25,000 per year to defray costs of the presidency.^[235]



President George Washington, Gilbert Stuart (1795)

Washington wrote to James Madison: "As the first of everything in our situation will serve to establish a precedent, it is devoutly wished on my part that these precedents be fixed on true principles."^[236] To that end, he preferred the title "Mr. President" over more majestic names proposed by the Senate, including "His Excellency" and "His Highness the President".^[237] His executive precedents included the inaugural address, messages to Congress, and the cabinet form of the executive branch.^[238]

Washington had planned to resign after his first term, but the political strife in the nation convinced him he should remain in office.^[239] He was an able administrator and a judge of talent and character, and he talked regularly with department heads to get their advice.^[240] He tolerated opposing views, despite fears that a democratic system would lead to political violence, and he conducted a smooth transition of power to his successor.^[241] He remained non-partisan throughout his presidency and opposed the divisiveness of political parties, but he favored a strong central government, was sympathetic to a Federalist form of government, and leery of the Republican opposition.^[242]

Washington dealt with major problems. The old Confederation lacked the powers to handle its workload and had weak leadership, no executive, a small bureaucracy of clerks, a large debt, worthless paper money, and no power to establish taxes.^[243] He had the task of assembling an executive department, and relied on Tobias Lear for advice selecting its officers.^[244] Great Britain refused to relinquish its forts in the American West,^[243] and Barbary pirates preyed on American merchant ships in the Mediterranean at a time when the United States did not even have a navy.^[245]

Cabinet and executive departments

Congress created executive departments in 1789, including the State Department in July, the Department of War in August, and the Treasury Department in September. Washington appointed fellow Virginian Edmund Randolph as Attorney General, Samuel Osgood as Postmaster General, Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of State, and Henry Knox as Secretary of War. Finally, he appointed Alexander Hamilton as Secretary of the Treasury. Washington's cabinet became a consulting and advisory body, not mandated by the Constitution.^[246]

Washington's cabinet members formed rival parties with sharply opposing views, most fiercely illustrated between Hamilton and Jefferson.^[247] Washington restricted cabinet discussions to topics of his choosing, without participating in the debate. He occasionally requested cabinet opinions in writing and expected department heads to agreeably carry out his decisions.^[243]

Domestic issues

The Washington Cabinet		
Office	Name	Term
President	George Washington	1789–1797
Vice President	John Adams	1789–1797
Secretary of State	John Jay	1789–1790
	Thomas Jefferson	1790–1793
Edmund Randolph	1794–1795	
Timothy Pickering	1795–1797	
Secretary of the Treasury	Alexander Hamilton	1789–1795
	Oliver Wolcott Jr.	1795–1797
Secretary of War	Henry Knox	1789–1794

Washington was apolitical and opposed the formation of parties, suspecting that conflict would undermine republicanism.^[248] His closest advisors formed two factions, portending the First Party System. Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton formed the Federalist Party to promote the national credit and a financially powerful nation. Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson opposed Hamilton's agenda and founded the Jeffersonian Republicans. Washington favored Hamilton's agenda, however, and it ultimately went into effect—resulting in bitter controversy.^[249]

	Timothy Pickering	1794–1796
James McHenry	1796–1797	
Attorney General	Edmund Randolph	1789–1794
	William Bradford	1794–1795
Charles Lee	1795–1797	

Washington proclaimed November 26 as a day of Thanksgiving in order to encourage national unity. "It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor." He spent that day fasting and visiting debtors in prison to provide them with food and beer.^[250]

In response to two antislavery petitions, Georgia and South Carolina objected and were threatening to "blow the trumpet of civil war". Washington and Congress responded with a series of pro-slavery measures: citizenship was denied to black immigrants; slaves were barred from serving in state militias; two more slave states (Kentucky in 1792, Tennessee in 1796) were admitted; and the continuation of slavery in federal territories south of the Ohio River was guaranteed. On February 12, 1793, Washington signed into law the Fugitive Slave Act, which overrode state laws and courts, allowing agents to cross state lines to capture and return escaped slaves.^[251] Many in the north decried the law believing the act allowed bounty hunting and the kidnappings of blacks.^[252] The Slave Trade Act of 1794, limiting American involvement in the Atlantic slave trade, was also enacted.^[253]

National Bank



The President's House in Philadelphia was Washington's residence from 1790 to 1797

Washington's first term was largely devoted to economic concerns, in which Hamilton had devised various plans to address matters.^[254] The establishment of public credit became a primary challenge for the federal government.^[255] Hamilton submitted a report to a deadlocked Congress, and he, Madison, and Jefferson reached the Compromise of 1790 in which Jefferson agreed to Hamilton's debt proposals in exchange for moving the nation's capital temporarily to Philadelphia and then south near Georgetown on the Potomac River.^[249] The terms were legislated in the Funding Act of 1790 and the Residence Act, both of which Washington signed into law. Congress authorized the assumption and payment of the nation's debts, with funding provided by customs duties and excise taxes.^[256]

Hamilton created controversy among Cabinet members by advocating the establishment of the First Bank of the United States. Madison and Jefferson objected, but the bank easily passed Congress. Jefferson and Randolph insisted that the new bank was beyond the authority granted by the constitution, as Hamilton believed. Washington sided with Hamilton and signed the legislation on February 25, and the rift became openly hostile between Hamilton and Jefferson.^[257]

The nation's first financial crisis occurred in March 1792. Hamilton's Federalists exploited large loans to gain control of U.S. debt securities, causing a run on the national bank;^[258] the markets returned to normal by mid-April.^[259] Jefferson believed Hamilton was part of the scheme, in spite of Hamilton's

efforts to ameliorate, and Washington again found himself in the middle of a feud.^[260]

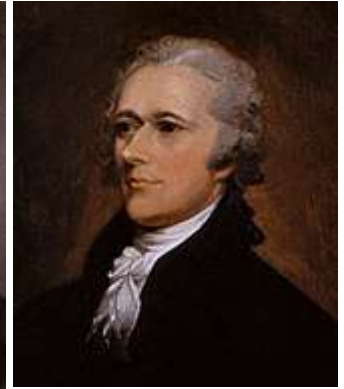
Jefferson–Hamilton feud

Jefferson and Hamilton adopted diametrically opposed political principles. Hamilton believed in a strong national government requiring a national bank and foreign loans to function, while Jefferson believed the government should be primarily directed by the states and the farm element; he also resented the idea of banks and foreign loans. To Washington's dismay, the two men persistently entered into disputes and infighting.^[261] Hamilton demanded that Jefferson resign if he could not support Washington, and Jefferson told Washington that Hamilton's fiscal system would lead to the overthrow of the Republic.^[262] Washington urged them to call a truce for the nation's sake, but they ignored him.^[263]

Jefferson and Hamilton, bitter rivals



Thomas Jefferson



Alexander Hamilton

Washington reversed his decision to retire after his first term in order to minimize party strife, but the feud continued after his re-election.^[262] Jefferson's political actions, his support of Freneau's *National Gazette*,^[264] and his attempt to undermine Hamilton nearly led Washington to dismiss him from the cabinet; Jefferson ultimately resigned his position in December 1793, and Washington forsook him from that time on.^[265]

The feud led to the well-defined Federalist and Republican parties, and party affiliation became necessary for election to Congress by 1794.^[266] Washington remained aloof from congressional attacks on Hamilton, but he did not publicly protect him, either. The Hamilton–Reynolds sex scandal opened Hamilton to disgrace, but Washington continued to hold him in "very high esteem" as the dominant force in establishing federal law and government.^[267]

Whiskey Rebellion

In March 1791, at Hamilton's urging, with support from Madison, Congress imposed an excise tax on distilled spirits to help curtail the national debt, which took effect in July.^[268] Grain farmers strongly protested in Pennsylvania's frontier districts; they argued that they were unrepresented and were shouldering too much of the debt, comparing their situation to excessive British taxation prior to the Revolutionary War. On August 2, Washington assembled his cabinet to discuss how to deal with the situation. Unlike Washington who had reservations about using force, Hamilton had long waited for such a situation and was eager to suppress the rebellion by use of Federal authority and force.^[269] Not wanting to involve the federal government if possible, Washington called on Pennsylvania state officials to take the initiative, but they declined to take military action. On August 7, Washington issued his first proclamation for calling up state militias. After appealing for peace, he reminded the protestors that, unlike the rule of the British crown, the Federal law was issued by state-elected representatives.^[270]

Threats and violence against tax collectors, however, escalated into defiance against federal authority in 1794 and gave rise to the Whiskey Rebellion. Washington issued a final proclamation on September 25, threatening the use of military force to no avail.^[270] The federal army was not up to the task, so Washington invoked the Militia Act of 1792 to summon state militias.^[271] Governors sent troops, initially commanded by Washington, who gave the command to Light-Horse Harry Lee to lead them into the

rebellious districts. They took 150 prisoners, and the remaining rebels dispersed without further fighting. Two of the prisoners were condemned to death, but Washington exercised his Constitutional authority for the first time and pardoned them.^[272]

Washington's forceful action demonstrated that the new government could protect itself and its tax collectors. This represented the first use of federal military force against the states and citizens,^[273] and remains the only time an incumbent president has commanded troops in the field. Washington justified his action against "certain self-created societies" which he regarded as "subversive organizations" which threatened the national union. He did not dispute their right to protest, but he insisted that their dissent must not violate federal law. Congress agreed and extended their congratulations to him; only Madison and Jefferson expressed indifference.^[274]

Foreign affairs



John Jay, negotiator of the Jay Treaty

In April 1792, the French Revolutionary Wars began between Great Britain and France, and Washington declared America's neutrality. The revolutionary government of France sent diplomat Citizen Genêt to America, and he was welcomed with great enthusiasm. He created a network of new Democratic-Republican Societies promoting France's interests, but Washington denounced them and demanded that the French recall Genêt.^[275] The National Assembly of France granted Washington honorary French citizenship on August 26, 1792, during the early stages of the French Revolution.^[276] Hamilton formulated the Jay Treaty to normalize trade relations with Great Britain while removing them from western forts, and also to resolve financial debts remaining from the Revolution.^[277] Chief Justice John Jay acted as Washington's negotiator and signed the treaty on November 19, 1794; critical Jeffersonians, however, supported France. Washington deliberated, then supported the treaty because it avoided war with Britain,^[278] but was disappointed that

its provisions favored Britain.^[279] He mobilized public opinion and secured ratification in the Senate^[280] but faced frequent public criticism.^[281]

The British agreed to abandon their forts around the Great Lakes, and the United States modified the boundary with Canada. The government liquidated numerous pre-Revolutionary debts, and the British opened the British West Indies to American trade. The treaty secured peace with Britain and a decade of prosperous trade. Jefferson claimed that it angered France and "invited rather than avoided" war.^[282] Relations with France deteriorated afterwards, leaving succeeding president John Adams with prospective war.^[283] James Monroe was the American Minister to France, but Washington recalled him for his opposition to the Treaty. The French refused to accept his replacement Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, and the French Directory declared the authority to seize American ships two days before Washington's term ended.^[284]

Native American affairs

Ron Chernow describes Washington as always trying to be even-handed in dealing with the Natives. He states that Washington hoped they would abandon their itinerant hunting life and adapt to fixed agricultural communities in the manner of Anglo-Saxon settlers. He also maintains that Washington never advocated outright confiscation of tribal land or the forcible removal of tribes, and that he berated American settlers who abused natives, admitting that he held out no hope for pacific relations with the



Seneca Chief Sagoyewatha was Washington's peace emissary with the Western Confederation.

natives as long as "frontier settlers entertain the opinion that there is not the same crime (or indeed no crime at all) in killing an native as in killing a white man."^[285]

By contrast, Colin G. Calloway writes that "Washington had a lifelong obsession with getting Indian land, either for himself or for his nation, and initiated policies and campaigns that had devastating effects in Indian country."^[286] "The growth of the nation," Galloway has stated, "demanded the dispossession of Indian people. Washington hoped the process could be bloodless and that Indian people would give up their lands for a "fair" price and move away. But if Indians refused and resisted, as they often did, he felt he had no choice but to "extirpate" them and that the expeditions he sent to destroy Indian towns were therefore entirely justified."^[287]

During the Fall of 1789, Washington had to contend with the British military occupation in the Northwest frontier and their concerted efforts to incite hostile Indian tribes to attack American settlers.^{[288][10]} The Northwest tribes under Miami chief Little Turtle allied with the British Army to resist American expansion, and killed 1,500 settlers between 1783

and 1790.^[289]

Washington decided that "The Government of the United States are determined that their Administration of Indian Affairs shall be directed entirely by the great principles of Justice and humanity",^[290] and provided that their land interests should be negotiated by treaties.^[290] The administration regarded powerful tribes as foreign nations, and Washington even smoked a peace pipe and drank wine with them at the Philadelphia presidential house.^[291] He made numerous attempts to conciliate them;^[292] he equated killing indigenous peoples with killing Whites and sought to integrate them into European American culture.^[293] Secretary of War Henry Knox also attempted to encourage agriculture among the tribes.^[292]

In the Southwest, negotiations failed between federal commissioners and raiding Indian tribes seeking retribution. Washington invited Creek Chief Alexander McGillivray and 24 leading chiefs to New York to negotiate a treaty and treated them like foreign dignitaries. Knox and McGillivray concluded the Treaty of New York on August 7, 1790 in Federal Hall, which provided the tribes with agricultural supplies and McGillivray with a rank of Brigadier General Army and a salary of \$1,500.^[294]

In 1790, Washington sent Brigadier General Josiah Harmar to pacify the Northwest tribes, but Little Turtle routed him twice and forced him to withdraw.^[295] The Western Confederacy of tribes used guerrilla tactics and were an effective force against the sparsely manned American Army. Washington sent Major General Arthur St. Clair from Fort Washington on an expedition to restore peace in the territory in 1791. On November 4, St. Clair's forces were ambushed and soundly defeated by tribal forces with few survivors, despite Washington's warning of surprise attacks. Washington was outraged over what he viewed to be excessive Native American brutality and execution of captives, including women and children.^[296]



Battle of Fallen Timbers by R. F. Zogbaum, 1896. The Ohio Country was ceded to America in its aftermath.

St. Clair resigned his commission, and Washington replaced him with the Revolutionary War hero General Anthony Wayne. From 1792 to 1793, Wayne instructed his troops on Native American warfare tactics and instilled discipline which was lacking under St. Clair.^[297] In August 1794, Washington sent Wayne into tribal territory with authority to drive them out by burning their villages and crops in the Maumee Valley.^[298] On August 24, the American army under Wayne's leadership defeated the western confederacy at the Battle of Fallen Timbers, and the Treaty of Greenville in August 1795 opened up two-thirds of the Ohio Country for American settlement.^[299]

Second term

Originally Washington had planned to retire after his first term, while many Americans could not imagine anyone else taking his place.^[300] After nearly four years as president, and dealing with the infighting in his own cabinet and with partisan critics, Washington showed little enthusiasm in running for a second term, while Martha also wanted him not to run.^[301] James Madison urged him not to retire, that his absence would only allow the dangerous political rift in his cabinet, and in the House, to worsen. Jefferson also pleaded with him not to retire and agreed to drop his attacks on Hamilton, or he would also retire if Washington did.^[302] Hamilton maintained that Washington's absence would be "deplored as the greatest evil" to the country at this time.^[303] Washington's close nephew George Augustine Washington, his manager at Mount Vernon, was critically ill and had to be replaced, further increasing Washington's desire to retire and return to Mount Vernon.^[304]

When the election of 1792 neared, Washington did not publicly announce his presidential candidacy but silently consented to run, to prevent a further political-personal rift in his cabinet. The Electoral College unanimously elected him president on February 13, 1793, and John Adams as vice president by a vote of 77 to 50.^[293] Washington, with nominal fanfare, arrived alone at his inauguration in his carriage. Sworn into office by Associate Justice William Cushing on March 4, 1793 in the Senate Chamber of Congress Hall in Philadelphia, Washington gave a brief address and then immediately retired to his Philadelphia presidential house, weary of office and in poor health.^[305]

On April 22, 1793, during the French Revolution, Washington issued his famous Neutrality Proclamation and was resolved to pursue, "a conduct friendly and impartial toward the belligerent Powers" while he warned Americans not to intervene in the international conflict.^[306] Although Washington recognized France's revolutionary government, he would eventually ask French minister to America Citizen Genêt be recalled over the Citizen Genêt Affair.^[307] Genêt was a diplomatic troublemaker who was openly hostile toward Washington's neutrality policy. He procured four American ships as privateers to strike at Spanish forces (British allies) in Florida while organizing militias to strike at other British possessions. But his efforts failed to draw America into the foreign campaigns during Washington's presidency.^[308] On July 31, 1793 Jefferson submitted his resignation from Washington's cabinet.^[309] Washington signed the Naval Act of 1794 and commissioned the first six federal frigates to combat Barbary pirates.^[310]



USS Constitution
Commissioned and named by
President Washington in 1794

In January 1795, Hamilton, who desired more income for his family, resigned office and was replaced by Washington appointment Oliver Wolcott, Jr.. Washington and Hamilton remained friends. However, Washington's relationship with his Secretary of War Henry Knox deteriorated. Knox resigned office on the rumor he profited from construction contracts on U.S. Frigates.^[311]

In the final months of his presidency, Washington was assailed by his political foes and a partisan press who accused him of being ambitious and greedy, while he argued that he had taken no salary during the war and had risked his life in battle. He regarded the press as a disuniting, "diabolical" force of falsehoods, sentiments that he expressed in his Farewell Address.^[312] At the end of his second term, Washington retired for personal and political reasons, dismayed with personal attacks, and to ensure that a truly contested presidential election could be held. He did not feel bound to a two-term limit, but his retirement set a significant precedent. Washington is often credited with setting the principle of a two-term presidency, but it was Thomas Jefferson who first refused to run for a third term on political grounds.^[313]

Farewell Address

In 1796, Washington declined to run for a third term of office, believing his death in office would create an image of a lifetime appointment. The precedent of a two-term limit was created by his retirement from office.^[314] In May 1792, in anticipation of his retirement, Washington instructed James Madison to prepare a "valedictory address", an initial draft of which was entitled the "Farewell Address".^[315] In May 1796, Washington sent the manuscript to his Secretary of Treasury Alexander Hamilton who did an extensive rewrite, while Washington provided final edits.^[316] On September 19, 1796, David Claypoole's *American Daily Advertiser* published the final version of the address.^[317]



Washington's Farewell Address
(September 19, 1796)

Washington stressed that national identity was paramount, while a united America would safeguard freedom and prosperity. He warned the nation of three eminent dangers: regionalism, partisanship, and foreign entanglements, and said the "name of AMERICAN, which belongs to you, in your national capacity, must always exalt the just pride of patriotism, more than any appellation derived from local discriminations."^[318] Washington called for men to move beyond partisanship for the common good, stressing that the United States must concentrate on its own interests. He warned against foreign alliances and their influence in domestic affairs and against bitter partisanship and the dangers of political parties.^[319] He counseled friendship and commerce with all nations, but advised against involvement in European wars.^[320] He stressed the importance of religion, asserting that "religion and morality are indispensable supports" in a republic.^[321] Washington's address favored Hamilton's Federalist ideology and economic policies.^[322]

Washington closed the address by reflecting on his legacy:

Though in reviewing the incidents of my Administration I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be, I fervently beseech the Almighty to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend. I shall also carry with me the hope that my country will never cease to view them with indulgence, and that, after forty-five years of my life dedicated to its service with an upright zeal, the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as myself must soon be to the mansions of rest.^[323]

After initial publication, many Republicans, including Madison, criticized the Address and believed it was an anti-French campaign document. Madison believed Washington was strongly pro-British. Madison also was suspicious of who authored the Address.^[324]

In 1839, Washington biographer Jared Sparks maintained that Washington's "... Farewell Address was printed and published with the laws, by order of the legislatures, as an evidence of the value they attached to its political precepts, and of their affection for its author."^[325] In 1972, Washington scholar James Flexner referred to the Farewell Address as receiving as much acclaim as Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence and Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.^[326] In 2010, historian Ron Chernow reported the *Farewell Address* proved to be one of the most influential statements on Republicanism.^[327]

Retirement (1797–1799)

Washington retired to Mount Vernon in March 1797 and devoted time to his plantations and other business interests, including his distillery.^[328] His plantation operations were only minimally profitable,^[38] and his lands in the west (Piedmont) were under Indian attacks and yielded little income, with the squatters there refusing to pay rent. He attempted to sell these but without success.^[329] He became an even more committed Federalist. He vocally supported the Alien and Sedition Acts and convinced Federalist John Marshall to run for Congress to weaken the Jeffersonian hold on Virginia.^[330]

Washington grew restless in retirement, prompted by tensions with France, and he wrote to Secretary of War James McHenry offering to organize President Adams' army.^[331] In a continuation of the French Revolutionary Wars, French privateers began seizing American ships in 1798, and relations deteriorated with France and led to the "Quasi-War". Without consulting Washington, Adams nominated him for a lieutenant general commission on July 4, 1798 and the position of commander-in-chief of the armies.^[332] Washington chose to accept, replacing James Wilkinson,^[333] and he served as the commanding general from July 13, 1798 until his death 17 months later. He participated in planning for a provisional army, but he avoided involvement in details. In advising McHenry of potential officers for the army, he appeared to make a complete break with Jefferson's Democratic-Republicans: "you could as soon scrub the blackamoor white, as to change the principles of a profest Democrat; and that he will leave nothing unattempted to overturn the government of this country."^[334] Washington delegated the active leadership of the army to Hamilton, a major general. No army invaded the United States during this period, and Washington did not assume a field command.^[335]

Washington was thought to be rich because of the well-known "glorified façade of wealth and grandeur" at Mount Vernon,^[336] but nearly all his wealth was in the form of land and slaves rather than ready cash. To supplement his income he erected a distillery for substantial whiskey production.^[337] Historians estimate that the estate was worth about \$1 million in 1799 dollars,^[338] equivalent to \$15,065,000 in 2019. He bought land parcels to spur development around the new Federal City that was named in his honor, and he sold individual lots to middle-income investors rather than multiple lots to large investors, believing they would more likely commit to making improvements.^[339]

Final days and death

On December 12, 1799, Washington inspected his farms on horseback in snow and sleet. He returned home late for dinner but refused to change out of his wet clothes, not wanting to keep his guests waiting. He had a sore throat the following day but again went out in freezing, snowy weather to mark trees for cutting. That evening, he complained of chest congestion, but was still cheerful. On Saturday, he awoke to an inflamed throat and difficulty breathing, so he ordered estate overseer George Rawlins to remove nearly a pint of his blood, bloodletting being a common practice of the time. His family summoned Doctors James Craik, Gustavus Richard Brown, and Elisha C. Dick.^[340] (Dr. William Thornton arrived some hours after Washington died.)^[341]



Washington on his Deathbed
Junius Brutus Stearns 1799

Dr. Brown thought Washington had quinsy; Dr. Dick thought the condition was a more serious "violent inflammation of the throat".^[342] They continued the process of bloodletting to approximately five pints, and Washington's condition deteriorated further. Dr. Dick proposed a tracheotomy, but the others were not familiar with that procedure and therefore disapproved.^[343] Washington instructed Brown and Dick to leave the room, while he assured Craik, "Doctor, I die hard, but I am not afraid to go."^[344]

Washington's death came more swiftly than expected.^[345] On his deathbed, he instructed his private secretary Tobias Lear to wait three days before his burial, out of fear of being entombed alive.^[346]

According to Lear, he died peacefully between 10 and 11 p.m. on December 14, 1799, with Martha seated at the foot of his bed. His last words were "'Tis well", from his conversation with Lear about his burial. He was 67.^[347]

Congress immediately adjourned for the day upon news of Washington's death, and the Speaker's chair was shrouded in black the next morning.^[348] The funeral was held four days after his death on December 18, 1799, at Mount Vernon, where his body was interred. Cavalry and foot soldiers led the procession, and six colonels served as the pallbearers. The Mount Vernon funeral service was restricted mostly to family and friends.^[349] Reverend Thomas Davis read the funeral service by the vault with a brief address, followed by a ceremony performed by various members of Washington's Masonic lodge in Alexandria, Virginia.^[350] Congress chose Light-Horse Harry Lee to deliver the eulogy. Word of his death traveled slowly; church bells rang in the cities, and many places of business closed.^[351] People worldwide admired Washington and were saddened by his death, and memorial processions were held in major cities of the United States. Martha wore a black mourning cape for one year, and she burned their correspondence to protect their privacy. Only five letters between the couple are known to have survived: two from Martha to George and three from him to her.^[352]



Miniature of George Washington by Robert Field (1800)

The diagnosis of Washington's illness and the immediate cause of his death have been subjects of debate since the day he died. The published account of Drs. Craik and Brown^[p] stated that his symptoms had been consistent with *cynanche trachealis* (tracheal inflammation), a term of that period used to describe severe inflammation of the upper windpipe, including quinsy. Accusations have persisted since Washington's death concerning medical malpractice, with some believing he had been bled to death.^[343] Various modern medical authors have speculated that he died from a severe case of epiglottitis complicated by the given treatments, most notably the massive blood loss which almost certainly caused hypovolemic shock.^{[354][q]}

Burial, net worth, and aftermath

Washington was buried in the old Washington family vault at Mount Vernon, situated on a grassy slope overspread with willow, juniper, cypress, and chestnut trees. It contained the remains of his brother Lawrence and other family members, but the decrepit brick vault was in need of repair, prompting Washington to leave instructions in his will for the construction of a new vault.^[351] Washington's estate

at the time of his death was worth an estimated \$780,000 in 1799, approximately equivalent to \$14.3 million in 2010.^[358] Washington's peak net worth was \$587.0 million, including his 300 slaves.^[359]

In 1830, a disgruntled ex-employee of the estate attempted to steal what he thought was Washington's skull, prompting the construction of a more secure vault.^[360] The next year, the new vault was constructed at Mount Vernon to receive the remains of George and Martha and other relatives.^[361] In 1832, a joint Congressional committee debated moving his body from Mount Vernon to a crypt in the Capitol. The crypt had been built by architect Charles Bulfinch in the 1820s during the reconstruction of the burned-out capital, after the Burning of Washington by the British during the War of 1812. Southern opposition was intense, antagonized by an ever-growing rift between North and South; many were concerned that Washington's remains could end up on "a shore foreign to his native soil" if the country became divided, and Washington's remains stayed in Mount Vernon.^[362]

On October 7, 1837, Washington's remains were placed, still in the original lead coffin, within a marble sarcophagus designed by William Strickland and constructed by John Struthers earlier that year.^[363] The sarcophagus was sealed and encased with planks, and an outer vault was constructed around it.^[364] The outer vault has the sarcophagi of both George and Martha Washington; the inner vault has the remains of other Washington family members and relatives.^[361]

Personal life

Washington was somewhat reserved in personality, but he generally had a strong presence among others. He made speeches and announcements when required, but he was not a noted orator or debater.^[366] He was taller than most of his contemporaries;^[367] accounts of his height vary from 6 ft (1.83 m) to 6 ft 3.5 in (1.92 m) tall, he weighed between 210–220 pounds (95–100 kg) as an adult,^[368] and he was known for his great strength.^[369] He had grey-blue eyes and reddish-brown hair which he wore powdered in the fashion of the day.^[370] He had a rugged and dominating presence, which garnered respect from his male peers.

Washington suffered frequently from severe tooth decay and ultimately lost all his teeth but one. He had several sets of false teeth made which he wore during his presidency—none of which were made of wood, contrary to common lore. These dental problems left him in constant pain, for which he took laudanum.^[371] As a public figure, he relied upon the strict confidence of his dentist.^[372]

Washington was a talented equestrian early in life. He collected thoroughbreds at Mount Vernon, and his two favorite horses were Blueskin and Nelson.^[373] Fellow Virginian Thomas Jefferson said Washington was "the best horseman of his age and the most graceful figure that could be seen on



The sarcophagi of George (right) and Martha Washington at the present tomb's entrance



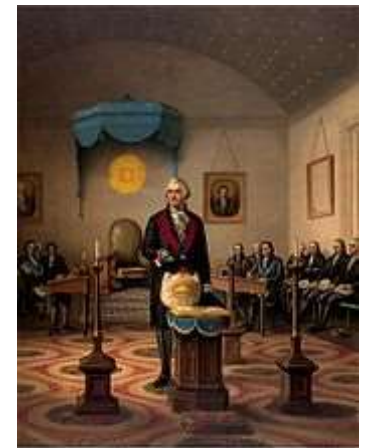
The Washington Family by Edward Savage (c. 1789-1796) portrays George and Martha Washington with Martha's grandchildren. National Art Gallery^[365]

horseback";^[374] he also hunted foxes, deer, ducks, and other game.^[375] He was an excellent dancer and attended the theater frequently. He drank in moderation but was morally opposed to excessive drinking, smoking tobacco, gambling, and profanity.^[376]

Religion and Freemasonry

Washington was descended from Anglican minister Lawrence Washington (his great-great-grandfather), whose troubles with the Church of England may have prompted his heirs to emigrate to America.^[377] Washington was baptized as an infant in April 1732 and became a devoted member of the Church of England (the Anglican Church).^[378] He served more than 20 years as a vestryman and churchwarden for Fairfax Parish and Truro Parish, Virginia.^[379] He privately prayed and read the Bible daily, and he publicly encouraged people and the nation to pray.^[380] He may have taken communion on a regular basis prior to the Revolutionary War, but he did not do so following the war, for which he was admonished by Pastor James Abercrombie.^[381]

Washington believed in a "wise, inscrutable, and irresistible" Creator God who was active in the Universe, contrary to deistic thought.^[377] He referred to God by the Enlightenment terms *Providence*, the *Creator*, or the *Almighty*, and also as the *Divine Author* or the *Supreme Being*.^[382] He believed in a divine power who watched over battlefields, was involved in the outcome of war, was protecting his life, and was involved in American politics—and specifically in the creation of the United States.^{[383][r]} Modern historian Ron Chernow has posited that Washington avoided evangelistic Christianity or hellfire-and-brimstone speech along with communion and anything inclined to "flaunt his religiosity". Chernow has also said Washington "never used his religion as a device for partisan purposes or in official undertakings".^[385] No mention of Jesus Christ appears in his private correspondence, and such references are rare in his public writings.^[386] He frequently quoted from the Bible or paraphrased it, and often referred to the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*.^[387] There is debate on whether he is best classed as a Christian or a theistic rationalist—or both.^[388]



George Washington as Master of his Lodge, 1793

Washington emphasized religious toleration in a nation with numerous denominations and religions. He publicly attended services of different Christian denominations and prohibited anti-Catholic celebrations in the Army.^[389] He engaged workers at Mount Vernon without regard for religious belief or affiliation. While president, he acknowledged major religious sects and gave speeches on religious toleration.^[390] He was distinctly rooted in the ideas, values, and modes of thinking of the Enlightenment,^[391] but he harbored no contempt of organized Christianity and its clergy, "being no bigot myself to any mode of worship".^[391] In 1793, speaking to members of the New Church in Baltimore, Washington proclaimed, "We have abundant reason to rejoice that in this Land the light of truth and reason has triumphed over the power of bigotry and superstition."^[392]

Freemasonry was a widely accepted institution in the late 18th century, known for advocating moral teachings.^[393] Washington was attracted to the Masons' dedication to the Enlightenment principles of rationality, reason, and brotherhood. The American Masonic lodges did not share the anti-clerical perspective of the controversial European lodges.^[394] A Masonic lodge was established in Fredericksburg in September 1752, and Washington was initiated two months later at the age of 20 as one of its first Entered Apprentices. Within a year, he progressed through its ranks to become a Master Mason.^[395] Washington had a high regard for the Masonic Order, but his personal lodge attendance was

sporadic. In 1777, a convention of Virginia lodges asked him to be the Grand Master of the newly established Grand Lodge of Virginia, but he declined due to his commitments leading the Continental Army. After 1782, he corresponded frequently with Masonic lodges and members,^[396] and he was listed as Master in the Virginia charter of Alexandria Lodge No. 22 in 1788.^[397]

Slavery

In Washington's lifetime, slavery was deeply ingrained in the economic and social fabric of Virginia.^[398] Washington owned and worked African slaves his entire adult life.^[399] He acquired them through inheritance, gained control of eighty-four dower slaves on his marriage to Martha and purchased at least seventy-one slaves between 1752 and 1773.^[400] His early views on slavery were no different from any Virginia planter of the time.^[401] He demonstrated no moral qualms about the institution and referred to his slaves as "a Species of Property".^[402] From the 1760s his attitudes underwent a slow evolution. The first doubts were prompted by his transition from tobacco to grain crops which left him with a costly surplus of slaves, causing him to question the economic efficiency of the system.^[403] His growing disillusionment with the institution was spurred by the principles of the American Revolution and revolutionary friends such as Lafayette and Hamilton.^[404] Most historians agree the Revolution was central to the evolution of Washington's attitudes on slavery;^[405] "After 1783", Kenneth Morgan writes, "...[Washington] began to express inner tensions about the problem of slavery more frequently, though always in private..."^[406]



Washington as Farmer at Mount Vernon
Junius Brutus Stearns, 1851

The many contemporary reports of slave treatment at Mount Vernon are varied and conflicting.^[407] Historian Kenneth Morgan (2000) maintains that Washington was frugal on spending for clothes and bedding for his slaves, and only provided them with just enough food, and that he maintained strict control over his slaves, instructing his overseers to keep them working hard from dawn to dusk year round.^[408] However, historian Dorothy Twohig (2001) said: "Food, clothing, and housing seem to have been at least adequate".^[409] Washington faced growing debts involved with the costs of supporting slaves. He held an "ingrained sense of racial superiority" over African Americans, but harbored no ill feelings toward them.^[410]

Some slave families worked at different locations on the plantation but were allowed to visit one another on their days off.^[411] Washington's slaves received two hours off for meals during the workday, and given time off on Sundays and religious holidays.^[412] Washington frequently cared for ill or injured slaves personally, and he provided physicians and midwives and had his slaves inoculated for smallpox.^[413] In May 1796, Martha's personal and favorite slave Ona Judge escaped to Portsmouth. At Martha's behest Washington attempted to capture Ona, using a Treasury agent, but this effort failed. In February 1797, Washington's personal slave Hercules escaped to Philadelphia and was never found.^[414]

Some accounts report that Washington opposed flogging, but at times sanctioned its use, generally as a last resort, on both male and female slaves.^[415] Washington used both reward and punishment to encourage discipline and productivity in his slaves. He tried appealing to an individual's sense of pride, gave better blankets and clothing to the "most deserving", and motivated his slaves with cash rewards. He believed "watchfulness and admonition" to be often better deterrents against transgressions, but would punish those who "will not do their duty by fair means". Punishment ranged in severity from

demotion back to fieldwork, through whipping and beatings, to permanent separation from friends and family by sale. Historian Ron Chernow maintains that overseers were required to warn slaves before resorting to the lash and required Washington's written permission before whipping, though his extended absences did not always permit this.^[416] Washington remained dependent on slave labor to work his farms and negotiated the purchase of more slaves in 1786 and 1787.^[417]

In February 1786, Washington took a census of Mount Vernon and recorded 224 slaves.^[418] By 1799, slaves at Mount Vernon totaled 317, including 143 children.^[419] Washington owned 124 slaves, leased 40, and held 153 for his wife's dower interest.^[420] Washington supported many slaves who were too young or too old to work, greatly increasing Mount Vernon's slave population and causing the plantation to operate at a loss.^[421]

Abolition and emancipation

Based on his letters, diary, documents, accounts from colleagues, employees, friends and visitors, Washington slowly developed a cautious sympathy toward abolitionism that eventually ended with the emancipation of his own slaves.^[422] As president, he kept publicly silent on slavery, believing it was a nationally divisive issue that could destroy the union.^[423]

In a 1778 letter to Lund Washington, he made clear his desire "to get quit of Negroes" when discussing the exchange of slaves for land he wanted to buy.^[424] The next year, he stated his intention not to separate families as a result of "a change of masters".^[425] During the 1780s Washington privately expressed his support for gradual emancipation of slaves.^[426] Between 1783 and 1786 he gave moral support to a plan proposed by Lafayette to purchase land and free slaves to work on it, but declined to participate in the experiment.^[409] Washington privately expressed support for emancipation to prominent Methodists Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury in 1785, but declined to sign their petition.^[427] In personal correspondence the next year, he made clear his desire to see the institution of slavery ended by a gradual legislative process, a view that correlated with the mainstream antislavery literature published in the 1780s that Washington possessed.^[428] He significantly reduced his purchases of slaves after the war, but continued to acquire them in small numbers.^[429]



In 1794, Washington privately expressed to Tobias Lear, his secretary, that he found slavery to be repugnant.

In 1788, Washington declined a suggestion from a leading French abolitionist, Jacques Brissot, to establish an abolitionist society in Virginia, stating that although he supported the idea, the time was not yet right to confront the issue.^[430] The historian Henry Wiencek (2003) believes, based on a remark that appears in the notebook of his biographer David Humphreys, that Washington considered making a public statement by freeing his slaves on the eve of his presidency in 1789.^[431] The historian Philip D. Morgan (2005) disagrees, believing the remark was a "private expression of remorse" at his inability to free his slaves.^[432] Other historians agree with Morgan that Washington was determined not to risk national unity over an issue as divisive as slavery.^[433] Washington never responded to any of the antislavery petitions he received, and the subject was not mentioned in either his last address to Congress or his Farewell Address.^[434]

The first clear indication that Washington was seriously intending to free his own slaves appears in a letter written to his secretary, Tobias Lear, in 1794.^[435] Washington instructed Lear to find buyers for his land in western Virginia, explaining in a private coda that he was doing so "to liberate a certain species of

property which I possess, very repugnantly to my own feelings".^[436] The plan, along with others Washington considered in 1795 and 1796, could not be realized because of his failure to find buyers for his land, his reluctance to break up slave families and the refusal of the Custis heirs to help prevent such separations by freeing their dower slaves at the same time.^[437]

On July 9, 1799, Washington finished making his last will; the longest provision concerned slavery. All his slaves were to be freed after the death of his wife Martha. Washington said he did not free them immediately because his slaves intermarried with his wife's dower slaves. He forbade their sale or transportation out of Virginia. His will provided that old and young freed people be taken care of indefinitely; younger ones were to be taught to read and write and placed in suitable occupations.^[438] Washington freed more than 160 slaves, including 25 he had acquired from his wife's brother in payment of a debt freed by graduation.^[439] He was among the few large slave-holding Virginians during the Revolutionary Era who emancipated their slaves.^[440]

On January 1, 1801, one year after George Washington's death, Martha Washington signed an order freeing his slaves. Many of them, having never strayed far from Mount Vernon, were naturally reluctant to try their luck elsewhere; others refused to abandon spouses or children still held as dower slaves (the Custis estate)^[441] and also stayed with or near Martha. Following George Washington's instructions in his will, funds were used to feed and clothe the young, aged, and sickly slaves until the early 1830s.^[442]

Historical reputation and legacy

Washington's legacy endures as one of the most influential in American history, since he served as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, a hero of the Revolution, and the first president of the United States. Various historians maintain that he also was a dominant factor in America's founding, the Revolutionary War, and the Constitutional Convention.^[443] Revolutionary War comrade Light-Horse Harry Lee eulogized him as "First in war—first in peace—and first in the hearts of his countrymen".^[444] Lee's words became the hallmark by which Washington's reputation was impressed upon the American memory, with some biographers regarding him as the great exemplar of republicanism. He set many precedents for the national government and the presidency in particular, and he was called the "Father of His Country" as early as 1778.^{[445][s]}



Washington, the Constable
by Gilbert Stuart (1797)

In 1885, Congress proclaimed Washington's birthday to be a federal holiday.^[447] Twentieth-century biographer Douglas Southall Freeman concluded, "The great big thing stamped across that man is character." Modern historian David Hackett Fischer has expanded upon Freeman's assessment, defining Washington's character as "integrity, self-discipline, courage, absolute honesty, resolve, and decision, but also forbearance, decency, and respect for others".^[448]

Washington became an international symbol for liberation and nationalism, as the leader of the first successful revolution against a colonial empire. The Federalists made him the symbol of their party, but the Jeffersonians continued to distrust his influence for many years and delayed building the Washington Monument.^[449] Washington was elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences on January 31, 1781, before he had even begun his presidency.^[450] He was posthumously appointed to the grade of General of the Armies of the United States during the United States

Bicentennial to ensure he would never be outranked; this was accomplished by the congressional joint resolution Public Law 94-479 passed on January 19, 1976, with an effective appointment date of July 4, 1976.^{[451][t]}

Parson Weems wrote a hagiographic biography in 1809 to honor Washington.^[454] Historian Ron Chernow maintains that Weems attempted to humanize Washington, making him look less stern, and to inspire "patriotism and morality" and to foster "enduring myths", such as Washington's refusal to lie about damaging his father's cherry tree.^[455] Weems' accounts have never been proven or disproven.^[456] Historian John Ferling, however, maintains that Washington remains the only founder and president ever to be referred to as "godlike", and points out that his character has been the most scrutinized by historians, past and present.^[457] Historian Gordon S. Wood concludes that "the greatest act of his life, the one that gave him his greatest fame, was his resignation as commander-in-chief of the American forces."^[458] Chernow suggests that Washington was "burdened by public life" and divided by "unacknowledged ambition mingled with self-doubt".^[459] A 1993 review of presidential polls and surveys consistently ranked Washington number 4, 3, or 2 among presidents.^[460] A 2018 Siena College Research Institute survey ranked him number 1 among presidents.^[461]

Memorials

Jared Sparks began collecting and publishing Washington's documentary record in the 1830s in *Life and Writings of George Washington* (12 vols., 1834–1837).^[462] *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745–1799* (1931–1944) is a 39-volume set edited by John Clement Fitzpatrick, who was commissioned by the George Washington Bicentennial Commission. It contains more than 17,000 letters and documents and is available online from the University of Virginia.^[463]

Universities

Numerous universities, including George Washington University and Washington University in St. Louis, were named in honor of Washington.^{[464][465]}



Washington Monument, Washington, D.C.

Places and monuments

Many places and monuments have been named in honor of Washington, most notably the nation's capital Washington, D.C. The state of Washington is the only state to be named after a president.^[466]

Currency and postage

George Washington appears on contemporary U.S. currency, including the one-dollar bill and the quarter-dollar coin (the Washington quarter). Washington and Benjamin Franklin appeared on the nation's first postage stamps in 1847. Washington has since appeared on many postage issues, more than any other person.^[467]



Statue of Washington at Washington University in St. Louis



Washington issue of 1862

Washington–Franklin issue of 1917

Washington quarter dollar



Washington on the 1928 dollar bill

See also

- [British Army during the American Revolutionary War](#)
- [List of American Revolutionary War battles](#)
- [List of Continental Forces in the American Revolutionary War](#)
- [Timeline of the American Revolution](#)

References

Notes

- a. April 6 is when Congress counted the votes of the Electoral College and certified a president. April 30 is when Washington was sworn in.^[1]

- b. Contemporaneous records used the Old Style Julian calendar and the Annunciation Style of enumerating years, recording his birth as February 11, 1731. The British Calendar (New Style) Act 1750 implemented in 1752 altered the official British dating method to the Gregorian calendar with the start of the year on January 1 (it had been March 25). These changes resulted in dates being moved forward 11 days, and an advance of one year for those between January 1 and March 25. For a further explanation, see Old Style and New Style dates.^[9]
- c. Washington received his license through the college, whose charter gave it the authority to appoint Virginia county surveyors. There is no evidence that he actually attended classes there.^[18]
- d. Thirty years later, Washington reflected "that so young and inexperienced a person should have been employed".^[24]
- e. The mid 16th century word **Indian** described the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas. More modern terms for Indian include American Indian and Native American and Indigenous Peoples.^[31]
- f. A second Virginia regiment was raised under Colonel William Byrd III and also allocated to the expedition.^[47]
- g. In a letter of September 20, 1765, Washington protested to "Robert Cary & Co." the low prices he received for his tobacco, and for the inflated prices he was forced to pay on second-rate goods from London.^[72]
- h. Historian Garry Wills noted, "before there was a nation—before there was any symbol of that nation (a flag, a Constitution, a national seal)—there was Washington."^[95]
- i. Congress initially directed the war effort in June 1776 with the committee known as "Board of War and Ordnance"; this was succeeded by the Board of War in July 1777, which eventually included members of the military.^[106]
- j. This painting has received both acclaim and criticism;^[123] see Emanuel Leutze article for details.
- k. Jefferson denounced the Society of Cincinnati's hereditary membership, but he praised Washington for his "moderation and virtue" in relinquishing command. Washington's wartime adversary King George III reportedly praised him for this act.^[203]
- l. In May 1783, Henry Knox formed the Society of the Cincinnati to carry on the memory of the War of Independence and to establish a fraternity of officers. The Society was named after Cincinnatus, a famous Roman military leader who relinquished his position after his Roman victory at Algidus (458 BC). However, he had reservations about some of the society's precepts, including heredity requirements for membership and receiving money from foreign interests.^[205]
- m. Starting in 1774, 14 men served as President of the Continental Congress but bore no relationship to the presidency established under Article II of the Constitution. Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress called its presiding officer "President of the United States in Congress Assembled", but this position had no national executive powers.^[225]
- n. There has been debate over whether Washington added "so help me God" to the end of the oath.^[231]
- o. A modern term for Indian is Native American.^[31]
- p. The first account of Washington's death was written by Doctors Craik and Brown, published in *The Times* of Alexandria five days after his death on December 19, 1799. The complete text can be found in *The Eclectic Medical Journal* (1858).^[353]
- q. Modern experts have concluded that Washington probably died from acute bacterial epiglottitis complicated by the administered treatments, including Morens and Wallenborn in 1999,^[355] Cheatham in 2008,^[356] and Vadakan in 2005.^[357] These treatments included multiple doses of calomel (a cathartic or purgative) and extensive bloodletting.

- r. The Constitution came under attack in Pennsylvania, and Washington wrote to Richard Peters, "It would seem from the public Gazettes that the minority in your State are preparing for another attack of the now adopted Government; how formidable it may be, I know not. But that Providence which has hitherto smiled on the honest endeavours of the well meaning part of the People of this Country will not, I trust, withdraw its support from them at this crisis."^[384]
- s. The earliest known *image* in which Washington is identified as the Father of His Country is in the frontispiece of a 1779 German-language almanac, with calculations by David Rittenhouse and published by Francis Bailey in Lancaster County Pennsylvania. *Der Gantz Neue Verbesserte Nord-Americanische Calendar* has a personification of Fame holding a trumpet to her lips juxtaposed with an image of Washington and the words "*Der Landes Vater*" ("the father of the country" or "the father of the land").^[446]
- t. In *Portraits & Biographical Sketches of the United States Army's Senior Officer*,^[452] William Gardner Bell states that Washington was recalled to military service from his retirement in 1798, and "Congress passed legislation that would have made him General of the Armies of the United States, but his services were not required in the field, and the appointment was not made until the Bicentennial in 1976, when it was bestowed posthumously as a commemorative honor." In 1976, President Gerald Ford specified that Washington would "rank first among all officers of the Army, past and present".^[453]

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